

Remarks on the Appointment of Michael D. McCurry as Assistant to the President and Press Secretary and an Exchange With Reporters January 5, 1995

The President. This is a live event. Now listen, you all have to be respectful. I just saw CNN describe this as a live event. [Laughter]

To none of your surprise, I am very pleased to announce the appointment of Mike McCurry as the Assistant to the President and the White House Press Secretary. He has done a very fine job representing our administration at the Department of State since I took office. He has dealt with the wide range of very sensitive, complicated, and difficult issues, and he's done it very well.

He has almost two decades of experience here in Washington, but to give you an idea of the kind of person he is in spite of that, the only pictures on his wall are the pictures of his wife and his two children. And they have a third one on the way. Debra and Mike told me on the way out here that they were the embodiment of the family values of this administration. [Laughter] And let me say I appreciate the personal sacrifice that both of them are making for Mike to do this job.

Legislative Agenda

Before I turn the podium over to Mr. Panetta and officially welcome Mike McCurry, let me say that, as all of you know, I had my first meeting today with the new bipartisan leadership of the Congress. I was very pleased with it in terms of tone and substance. I congratulated them in the House on passing the bill that requires Congress to live under the laws it imposes on the private sector. That bill passed the House last year by a similar margin, but it didn't pass the Senate. I hope it will this time, and I pledge to sign it quickly.

I'd also like to see further movement on political reform in areas where we clearly agree: the line-item veto, the unfunded mandates issue. We can do a lot of business together for the benefit of the country.

The other thing that happened in the meeting today that really impressed me was an acknowledgement by the Members of the Congress who have been here for years and years in both parties that they made a mistake back in 1981 to adopt a bidding war in the tax cuts that

gave us what became known as "trickle-down economics" and quadrupled the national debt. And they agreed that we ought to have a limit to how much we can pay for that with spending cuts, so that there is going to be, apparently, no attempt to go back to what I call trickle-down economics, to exploding the deficit and a ratification of the work of the last 2 years in reducing the deficit by \$700 billion, which is about \$11,000 a family in this country. I was happy with that result.

I think there will be a lot of other things we can do, but I hope now that the House has taken one vote in the reform area, they will keep on going with the line-item veto, with the unfunded mandates legislation, and hopefully, too, with lobby reform and other reforms. I'm sorry the lobby reform legislation didn't pass yesterday, but it can pass on its own merits, and it's a very important part of what we need to do to restore the confidence of the American people in our Government here.

Thank you very much.

Q. President Clinton, it almost sounds as if you're saying that the country is better off because Republicans won the majority in Congress.

The President. No. The country is better off because we reduced the deficit, produced 5 billion jobs, expanded trade by record amounts, and did some things to help ordinary people deal with their lives. But people are living through a time of great uprooting, with great changes in their lives. They voted to give the majority control in Congress to the Republicans.

My job is not to do what they did. My job is not to stand in the way and be an obstructionist force. My job is not to practice the politics of personal destruction. My job is to work with them to try to help build this country. And that's what I'm going to do.

If they want to keep bringing the deficit down, that's something we started. If they want to reduce the Government, that's something we began. If they want to pass welfare reform, if they want to deal with health care reform, if they want to deal with these governmental reform issues that I have supported for years, like

the line-item veto, the country can be better off. Yes, the country can be better off if we work together than if we don't.

But that should be taken in no way as a diminishing in my eyes of what happened in the last 2 years, which was terrific. Even if the voters didn't agree or didn't even know about it, it was good for the country, and the country's better off. So the country's better off today than it was 2 years ago.

What our moral and legal obligation is, is to make sure that the country will be better off 2 years from now. I think the people are sick, literally sick of seeing all this partisan infighting up here. I just showed up here 2 years ago, and I was bewildered by it. I was astonished by it. And I was revolted by it. And I think the American people are, too.

Now, the others who were in that room with me today, starting with Speaker Gingrich and Senator Dole, they've been part of the Washington scene for a lot longer than I have, for decades. And I understand that. But they said

they wanted to see an end to the partisan infighting. The Democrats, to their everlasting credit, said that they had learned from the Republicans how to stop things, but they thought that was not their job. Their job was to make things happen. So that's what we're trying to do. And I'm going to do my best to make good things happen for America. I do not want to see a series of partisan battles.

We need first to identify what we can agree on and move this country forward. And we ought to start with lobby reform and these other reforms. Then we ought to move on to responsible tax reform that I hope will focus on the middle class bill of rights and giving people education deductions because that will build the economy.

This is Mike McCurry's press conference, and I've already said enough.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:46 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Agenda for the 104th Congress *January 5, 1995*

Dear _____:

We have an opportunity to make historic change in the way that Washington works and the government does the people's business.

This week, the Congress has begun to take important and positive steps to change its operations for the better. Shrinking the number of committees, reducing staff, and other measures are valuable, and long overdue. The passage of legislation that would apply to Congress the laws that apply to the public is only fair, is simple common sense, and is also long overdue. I hope that this time, unlike the last session of Congress, the Senate follows the House's action. I congratulate you on these steps.

But true congressional reform must reduce the power of lobbyists and special interests. The power of organized money in Washington hurts the middle class, bloats spending and the deficit, and blocks needed change. Today, some 90,000 people in Washington are associated with lobbying Congress on behalf of specific interests, which too often are able to manipulate the con-

gressional process to insert spending projects or tax provisions in legislation that do not serve the larger public's interest. Lobby power coupled with the ever-escalating cost of campaigns, which has risen fourfold over the past two decades, gives wealthy interests and wealthy candidates disproportionate influence in decision-making.

These are not partisan concerns; they are American concerns. I urge you, as you undertake the task of reforming Congress, to take on these real political reform issues.

First, as you enact legislation to apply general laws to Congress, it is vital that professional lobbyists be barred from giving gifts, meals and entertainment to members of Congress—just as they are now barred from giving these benefits to executive branch officials.

Second, Congress should also quickly enact legislation to bring professional lobbyists into the sunlight of public scrutiny. The current lobby disclosure statute is cumbersome and antiquated. Lobbyists should disclose who their cli-